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SUBJECT: Goma Situation Report for December 12, 2007

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED - PROTECT ACCORDINGLY

Note: The following report was provided by Embassy Kinshasa's political officer in Goma. End note.

1. (SBU) Summary: In the course of December 11, FARDC abandoned its remaining positions west of Sake, leaving MONUC to defend the town. Nkunda's commanders communicated to MONUC Brigade Commander General Narayan that they would not enter Sake, but not before the nearby fighting had caused a movement of the populace eastward and considerable concern in the city of Goma. Journalists were caught overnight in Minova (just within South Kivu, on the lake), where they interviewed persons who had fled Nkunda's capture of Karuba and bore witness to pillage and terror. End Summary.

2. (SBU) According to MONUC military and political officers, speaking to Goma poloff December 12, renegade General Laurent Nkunda's forces attacked the strategic Celtel ridge northwest of Sake beginning at 14:45 December 11 and completed its capture by 17:30. By 20:00 they had also captured the Celtel tower itself, on a prominence nearer to and dominating Sake, by which time FARDC had abandoned all of its positions in Sake, leaving its defense to MONUC. The FARDC three brigades involved in the campaign at Mushaki had "dispersed in every direction." MONUC North Kivu Brigade Commander General Indrajeet Narayan was in Sake during the evening of December 11 and again in the morning December 12. He spoke to Nkunda's commanders, informing them that Sake was an absolute red line, and they assured him that they would not attempt to take Sake. MONUC made a show of force with its combat helicopters but did not fire any shots. MONUC concluded that there had been a complete lack of leadership at the highest levels of FARDC, including 8th Region commander General Vainqueur Mayala, during recent days.

3. (SBU) There was a movement of the Sake populace eastward (a "sea of humanity," according to military briefer). MONUC political briefer suggested that as many as 20,000 persons had been displaced eastward from Sake, with a possible 70-80,000 persons displaced in recent days over the entire area of fighting. However, OCHA reports that the nearby IDP camps at Mugunga have not seen an infusion of new IDP's, suggesting that the Sake populace did not move far toward Goma.

4. (SBU) The extent of Nkunda's capture of arms and ammunition over the past two days remains unclear. FARDC denies significant losses, while MONUC thinks it highly probable that Nkunda captured important caches of arms both in Mushaki and Kingi, and possibly in Karuba. (Belgian Consul General claims good information on capture of arms at Karuba.) MONUC could not confirm reports that Nkunda's forces had now reached as far as Ngungu (15 miles southwest of Sake).

5. (SBU) Military and political briefers indicated that an exchange of fire was ongoing during the morning of December 12 at Rubari (a strategic point near the watershed divide on the Goma-Rutshuru

axis). It did not yet appear to more than a skirmish. Meanwhile, the picture to the north of Kitchanga was unclear. Poloff related that provincial deputy Simon Kazungu had told him December 12 that FARDC had taken Mweso, 10 miles north of Nkunda's "capital" at Kitchanga. Military briefer acknowledged that FARDC's 15th Integrated Brigade (which had disintegrated the previous week when Nkunda attacked Nyanzale) had now been reconstituted and was active in the area; however, there was incessant fighting between FDLR/Pareco forces and Nkunda troops in the area, which might account for what might be mere rumor.

¶6. (SBU) AFP informed poloff on the evening of December 11 that several journalists were holed up in Minova (on Lake Kivu just inside the South Kivu border), where many persons had fled from Nkunda's capture of Karuba. They gave the journalists first-hand accounts of brutality, to include shooting civilians as they were fleeing and random shooting into houses. MONUC Public Information officer Sylvie van den Wildenberg told Goma poloff December 12 that she had advised the journalists to stay in Minova, as the land route back through Sake was unsafe. However, Minova had also then suffered a shoot-up, apparently at the hands of FARDC soldiers (14th Integrated Brigade) fleeing from the fighting and bent on their own pillage. The journalists were safe, and MONUC planned to evacuate them by boat in the course of the day.

¶7. (SBU) Van den Wildenberg said that she had been working round the clock to cope with popular alarm in Goma. Governor Julien Paluku of North Kivu had been in a state of "panic" but she had got him to participate in a radio broadcast at opening of day December 12 to reassure the populace ("setback not defeat, MONUC has situation in hand").

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